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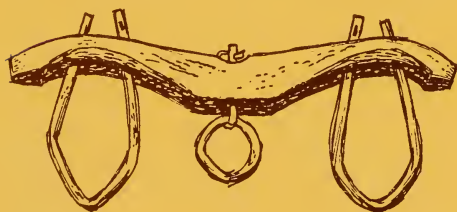
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Barton, William E

Abraham Lincoln & the American
ideal

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William E. Barton



ABRAHAM LINCOLN
AND THE AMERICAN IDEAL

By
WILLIAM E. BARTON, D. D., LL. D.

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WILLIAM E. BARTON, D. D., LL. D.

Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Oak Park, Illinois.

Author of "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln," "The Paternity
of Abraham Lincoln," etc.

A Sermon

Broadcast by Radio from the Westinghouse Station and the Platform of Orchestra
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PREFACE

The Casper Daily Tribune takes pleasure in presenting to its friends this reprint from its columns of what may be the first sermon ever transmitted by radio and received at a station at a long distance from the point at which the sermon was delivered.

The preacher, Dr. William E. Barton, is Pastor of the First Congregational Church of Oak Park, the largest church of that communion in Chicago and its suburbs. He is Moderator of the National Council of the Congregational Churches in the United States. He is also the foremost living authority on the life of Abraham Lincoln. His books "The Soul of Abraham Lincoln," "The Paternity of Abraham Lincoln," etc., are among the undisputed authorities on the life and character of the great President.

This sermon was twice broadcast on the same day. It was first sent out from the Westinghouse Station in Chicago at 2:30 on the afternoon of Sunday, February 11, and in the evening it was delivered before a large audience in Orchestra Hall, in Chicago, and this delivery was broadcast from the Orchestra Hall Station. How many scores of thousands of people listened to it can only be conjectured. The Casper Daily Tribune, at its station, the largest in Wyoming, received it at both deliveries, and printed it in its editions for the following morning. It has pleasure in presenting a limited number of copies in this pamphlet form, and has what it counts reasonable pride in what may be an achievement somewhat different from any that has been attained before.

THE PUBLISHERS.



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ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE AMERICAN IDEAL.

“And their prince shall be of themselves, and their ruler shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me; for who is he that hath had boldness to approach unto me? saith Jehovah. And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.”—Jeremiah 30:21-22.

“That (1) The people are sovereign; (2) the majority may rightfully exercise the sovereignty of the people; (3) the proletariat is a majority of the people; (4) therefore the proletariat is sovereign. This means that the proletariat has the sovereign right to exercise absolute and irresponsible domination over the lives, liberties, conduct of all persons and all societies.”—Politics, by Frank Exline.

If that be the meaning of democracy, it is as certainly doomed as is the divine right of kings.

This is the promise of God to a people emancipated from the rule of kings, and acknowledging the sovereignty of God, expressed through the will of the people. The people shall raise up their own rulers, such is the promise, and these chosen men, representatives at once of God and of the people, shall have nearer access to God than kings have dared to assume.

Jeremiah wrote these words during the Babylonian exile. One king of Judah, Jehoahaz, son of Josiah, was a captive in Egypt; another, Jehoiachin, a lad of eighteen years, had been carried away with his mother as a captive to Babylon; another, Zedekiah, a poor puppet, was reigning in Jerusalem, a vassal of the Babylonian king. The long line of Davidic kings had raveled out into three rotten strands, and broken. What were the people to do for a king? For the present, they could do nothing but accept the conditions of their exile in Babylon; but the time was to come when they would raise up their own rulers, governing for the good of the people, and by the will of the people; and these were to be men who could approach unto God. Of such a nation, Jehovah would gladly be the God, and they were to be his people.

There is a popular impression that the self-governing principle is something new on earth; that it is an experiment almost untried, and with its success still far from as-

sured. It is believed that the Bible bases its teaching of God and of human society upon the monarchical principle. The very phraseology of both Testaments lends color to this view. In the Old Testament we have the Kingdom of David continuing for five hundred years, and then reappearing as an ideal and a hope, associated even then with the coming of Christ and the dreams of mankind for the future of the race. For hundreds of years that now have grown to thousands, kings have ruled over almost the whole of mankind. The Calvinistic theology, which underlies the teachings of a considerable number of Protestant churches, is based upon the absolute sovereignty of God. I am myself a Calvinist. I am not the kind of Calvinist that John Calvin was. I am the kind of Calvinist that John Calvin would be if he were living now. John Calvin lived in an age of kings, but he established a republic in Geneva. He believed in a sovereign God, but he believed in the authority of God expressed in the will of an intelligent and righteous community. If Calvin were living now he would be as fearless and forward-looking and constructive a thinker as he was in his own day. He still would believe in the sovereignty of God, but he would believe in that sovereignty expressed through a people taught to do the will of God, and a people intelligent and righteous enough to administer their affairs intelligently and righteously.

The whole government of God is from within. Gravitation is not imposed upon matter from without. Oxygen and hydrogen combine to make water, not by external pressure, but by reason of the laws inherent in their own being. The God who is revealed to us in the crucibles of the chemists is a God who governs the universe, not by imposing an arbitrary will from the outside, but one who has put his own life into the very constitution of chemical substance and processes.

Every snowflake that falls down from the skies comes built upon a plan of six; every apple blossom and every rose is based upon a plan of five; every lily is construed upon a plan of three; every diamond and every lump of coal is ordered upon the plan of four. Now, this is not done by stamping the snowflakes in a press, nor by angels going about in the night and pulling off a petal where there are too many and sticking on one where there are too few. The

law that declares that every apple blossom shall have five petals was inherent in the very seed from which the first apple tree grew. The snowflakes, shaped as they are in conformity with a single basic plan, are every one of them unlike every other one in the carrying out of that plan. In all nature the law of God is written within. It is not imposed from without. Gravitation and chemical affinity and crystallization and efflorescence are all sections in the bill of rights which guarantees that the kingdom of God shall everywhere be administered as a republic.

It has taken the world a long time to discover that the kingdom of God is really a republic of God. When we go back and read our Old Testament we find Samuel protesting against the establishment of a monarchy. When we come to the New Testament we find a church established on the basis of a principle in harmony with that of Jeremiah, which promises that God will put His law into the hearts of His people, so that there shall be no continued necessity for arbitrary government. This is a promise of a people sufficiently intelligent and well disposed to be capable of self-government.

Upon this principle the government of America was founded. If it is to work successfully, America must raise up her own leaders, and elevate them to positions of power, and must trust their leadership and go forward with them in the maintenance of a durable democracy.

Abraham Lincoln rose from among the people. No leader of a nation since time began grew out of roots more deeply sunk in the common soil of a people's life. His parents were honest, unassuming and virtuous people. They had neither wealth, nor learning, nor social position. From them he inherited nothing which seemed to give promise of his subsequent elevation to influence and power. If we were to read the whole content of recorded history in search of the names of men who fulfilled the promise of Jeremiah, we should not find any other more clearly fulfilling this prediction than Abraham Lincoln. This prince of American life was from the people; this ruler came forth from the midst of the people. The great words which he spoke at Gettysburg were of a government of the people, by the people and for the people. He himself was of the people. He attained to his position of power by the will of the people. He exercised the prerog-

ative of government for the people. In him the rest of the text became true, namely, that in his righteous and unselfish rulership he brought the people into closer relationship with God. When we think of Abraham Lincoln we are reminded first of all of his kinship with the people, and then we are reminded of their high privilege and responsibility as the people of God.

The glory of a nation is its heritage of great names. America is rich in her list of noble men, who laid her foundations and established the main lines of her national development. With gratitude we remember the godly men of Plymouth Rock—William Brewster, William Bradford, Miles Standish. We remember the founders of our colonies, the gay and versatile Captain John Smith, the serious and righteous John Winthrop, and William Penn, the bloodless conqueror. We think of the days of the American Revolution, with our Patrick Henry and Benjamin Franklin and Israel Putnam and Light-Horse Harry Lee and George Washington. We remember the leaders of America in the days when she first became a nation—John Adams and Thomas Jefferson and Alexander Hamilton. We think with pride of the pioneers who crossed the mountains and carved new commonwealths out of the wilderness—George Rogers Clark, Rufus Putnam, Daniel Boone, David Crockett, Kit Carson and Sam Houston. We recall the prowess of the mighty triumvirate in the days that preceded the war—Henry Clay and John C. Calhoun and Daniel Webster, and with them such giants as Andrew Jackson and Thomas Hart Benton, who pointed toward the Pacific Ocean and said, "This way lies the east." And we shall not need to be reminded of the galaxy of noted names that came into American history in the days of the Civil War. From the beginning of her history America has been blessed with great leaders, who have incarnated her spirit and fought for her ideals.

But among all the great men whom America has produced, there is not one that is so completely and distinctively American as Abraham Lincoln.

It is enough for most men that they faithfully incorporate in their life the spirit of their own age. It is enough to ask of a man, ordinarily, that he shall be true to the best

that is in his own time. Abraham Lincoln did this, and he was a man of his own period and epoch. But he was more than this. He was a cross-section of American life from its beginning until its unification at the end of a great war. He was an epitome of America's whole life and history.

Lincoln's own grandfather was killed by the Indians; Lincoln's father, then a little lad, witnessed the savage murder. The future President heard that story told and retold a hundred times in his childhood, until he must almost have seemed to himself to have been present. His childhood was surrounded by the solitude of the vast woods; the backgrounds of his life were those of the savage and unbroken wilderness. He emerged from the woods into the pioneer settlements of Gentryville and New Salem. He spent his professional life as a lawyer in county seats and in the capital city of a new commonwealth. His way out into the world was first by means of the flat-boat and then by the stage-coach and then by the railway. And so he came at length to Washington, where he lived the last four years of his life. His journey was not simply a transition from the log cabin to the White House; it was an orderly evolution, which carried with it, step by step, the life and significance of the epoch in which he was living. At each stage he was a part of the civilization which he experienced. He was not thrust into any situation from above; he grew up from a state of civilization more primitive into each of the conditions in which he successively lived.

Thus it came about that Lincoln lived the life of America from its crude backwoods beginnings to its advanced civilization. He was an index and epitome of our national life. He incarnated our spirit all the way from the cabin in the wilderness to the seat of power where cross the high roads of the world's progress. He was not simply a man who had been born in a forest cabin and had lived on the prairies and who went to make his home in the White House; he was a man who had lived the life of America all the way and all the time.

Such an American could not have been in earlier days; and just such an American, in the externals of his whole life, could hardly be today. He came in the time and in the way that made it possible for him to stand as the fore-

most representative of American life and the full realization of the meaning of all her history. He was more than American; he is America.

The time is approaching for a just estimate of the character of Abraham Lincoln. Up to the present time we have been too near to him. I once sailed up the Columbia River so near to the foot of Mount Hood that I could not see the summit. Even so, great men are almost lost to sight amid the foothills of their contemporaries. But as we recede from Abraham Lincoln, he ceases to be merely one of the great men of his time. The foothills flatten and are lost in the horizon, and he stands as the summit of Mount Hood stands, isolated and radiant. We have other great men, but we have none other so great as he. Abraham Lincoln is the first and greatest of all the great men whom America has given to the world.

The name of Lincoln means opportunity. It suggests at once the privilege which belongs to every American of making of himself as great a man as he is capable of making.

The name of Lincoln spells integrity. It stands for honor in public and private life. It means patriotism and the love of humanity. It stands for loyalty to an ideal.

The name of Lincoln is a synonym for faith in the righteous rule of the people. It stands for the principle which lies at the root of our faith in a republican form of government. That principle is one which Lincoln was fond of quoting from the Declaration of Independence, that as regards their right before the law, all men are created equal, and which he set forth in his closing words at Gettysburg, in his confession of faith in government of the people, by the people and for the people.

The theory of democratic government as often held is thus stated by a recent author:

It is to be feared that something like this is what many people mean when they talk about democracy. But if this is what they mean, then they are building their hopes of durable government upon the sand. Mob rule is as dangerous a form of despotism as any on earth. A single tyrant is better than a mob of tyrants; if worst comes to worst, a monarchy gives us fewer heads to be cut off. A monarchy may be better than a republic, unless the average voter is

more intelligent, righteous and unselfish than the average king.

A republic is a most unsafe form of government for any but an intelligent and righteous people. If the American people become so immersed in their own private enterprises that they pay no heed to the public welfare; if they suffer the national spirit to decay while they madly pursue their mercenary aims; if the motto on our coins comes to mean "In God we trust because we cannot trust each other," then democracy as we know it in America will prove to be the last forlorn hope of a world long dominated by tyranny, and that hope doomed to hopeless disappointment.

We have made the mistake of assuming that if we could get better governmental machinery it would run itself. We have assumed that the panacea for all our ills lay in constitutional amendments, statutes enacted by our legislatures, or decisions handed down by our supreme courts. On the contrary, there is no remedy for the evils that threaten a people except intelligence and righteousness incorporated in the life of the whole body of the people. If that spirit is true, then there will be righteous legislation and intelligent enforcement of the laws; but if that spirit be not there, then we may break down the printing presses printing the output of our legislative assemblies, and it will be sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

So many and so appalling are the evils that threaten a republican form of government, we may not wonder that people often despair of it. But there is no other refuge. We may not escape by jumping out of the frying-pan of democracy into the fire of despotism. So long as the common men can fire a gun or hurl a bomb, there is no safety for government that does not represent the intelligence and will of a righteous people.

A constitutional monarchy is under less obligation than a republic to produce a leadership that is great in its own personality. A monarchy can idealize a commonplace man and know that he is commonplace and not feel at all humiliated by the process. In a recent essay, Dean Inge tells America that America need not be surprised that the English are able to idealize a very commonplace man; he says that it is just as easy as it is to idealize a piece of striped bunting. A constitutional monarchy limits the power of its

kings, and invests the office itself with a sort of sanctity which makes it comparatively unimportant that the occupant of the throne should himself be great in the qualities that make for leadership. If the king is great and good, so much the better; but if he is not, still there is respect for the throne that saves its occupant from excess of scorn. But a republic must raise up great leaders. The office of President is compassed about with insufficient glory to save an unworthy occupant from contempt; indeed, it has too little glory to insure that a worthy President shall always be known as such and receive the honor which is his due. An American President, if a really capable man, is likely to raise up sufficient opposition to make his presidency not wholly a joy, but if he is a great man he has an opportunity to test out the quality of his greatness. He must possess two kinds of leadership, and Lincoln possessed them both. He must be able to see farther and clearer than the people, and he must not lose his touch with the people. Lincoln was great in his combination of these two qualities of leadership.

But a republic must recognize its great leaders. It is not always certain that recognition will be the result of popular elections. Conspicuous candidates often kill each other off, and conventions vote for compromise candidates. Lincoln was such a compromise. But that time, at least, the convention and the country found, even if by accident, the truly greatest man. We cannot always depend upon such accidents. A republic should have certain methods of the people, and should set them on high. In Lincoln's case, the judgment of the people did not fail. They believed in Lincoln, and he believed in them.

A democracy uninspired and unguided is not a form of government to be desired. It is certain to be exploited by the boss, and likely to be delivered over eventually to the tyrant.

When, in 1804, Beethoven composed his symphony, "Eroica," he dedicated it to the man who then seemed to be the incarnation of those republican ideals which at that time possessed so many of the poets and musicians of Europe. There was a man then risen to fame who had come up from the common people, and who seemed to be destined

by Providence to deliver mankind from the despotism of kings. That man was Napoleon Bonaparte, the champion of liberty, the ideal of republican rule. But in May of that very year, Napoleon, already in reality an absolute ruler, assumed the title of emperor, and Beethoven tore away his title page and the symphony went forth undedicated. Indeed, that symphony might stand with Schubert's as an "unfinished symphony," because Beethoven never found the man to whom this heroic composition might be dedicated. We are painfully reminded that a democratic movement may raise up leaders, and the leaders themselves may betray the spirit that brought them into power. But if such a composition had been written in honor of Lincoln, it would never have needed to be altered. He reminds us that a republic may raise up a great leader, may recognize his leadership and raise him to power, and expect him to remain loyal to the principles that made him great, and never betray the people. Abraham Lincoln kept faith with the people.

Thus it is that Lincoln stands forth as the incarnation of loyalty to the ideal of America. His was the standard of personal honor, his was the confidence in America and her principles of government, which certify to us and to the world the righteousness of the rule of the people.

Now this, our text, reminds us is no new discovery. The prophet Jeremiah believed in these principles. "The captains and the kings" departed in his day, one into Egypt and another into Babylon. The temple fell and the priesthood was violently dispossessed, but he believed that the people were capable of developing the capacity of self-government; and America believes that Jeremiah was right; and one proof of their belief is Abraham Lincoln.

The kingdom of God is a republic. It is a reign in which God's guidance is manifest through the intelligence and the honesty and the unselfishness and the right-mindedness of the people. There is no certainty of right in majorities. There is no safety in mere numbers. The rule of the people can be made no better than the intelligence and righteousness of the people. There is no possibility of perfecting political machinery or passing such excellent laws as to make the world safe for democracy or democracy safe for the world. There is only one way to insure that government

of, for and by the people shall not perish from the earth, and that is to make it not only free but intelligent; not also popular but righteous. The only way to do that is to educate and elevate the moral standards of the whole people.

This is precisely what Jeremiah believed. It is what Lincoln believed. It is what the world is coming to believe.

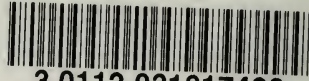
Lincoln returned to political life in 1854 under the powerful incentive of moral compulsion. He entered upon his race for the Senate against Stephen A. Douglas in 1858, declaring that a house divided against itself could not stand; that America must choose whether she was to be all slave or all free. He may go further. A nation divided against itself, into ignorant and educated, righteous and unrighteous, cannot stand. We must educate and elevate all our people and make the rule of the people something else than the rule of the mob.

A world divided against itself cannot stand. It cannot endure half armed and half unarmed, half peaceable and half militaristic. It cannot endure with one half cherishing hatred and contempt and suspicion against the other half. The world must learn a basis of self-government in righteousness. The world is just beginning to believe this; and that is one reason why, on this day, the name of Abraham Lincoln is being honored in the pulpits of the world, and tomorrow will be honored in legislative halls and at banquet tables and in meetings for international good will, not in America only, but throughout the earth.

America makes high profession of faith when she claims Abraham Lincoln as the norm and exponent of her national life. The manhood of a nation that claims Lincoln should be clean, upright, honest, patriotic, sympathetic, magnanimous, noble. Can America claim that for her manhood? It is her clear duty and her high privilege to aspire that this shall be true. She has a right to tell to her youth the story of Lincoln, and to teach her young manhood to emulate his simple virtues. She has a right to hang his portrait on the walls of her legislative halls and her courts of justice. She has a right to name him in her intercourse with other nations. She has a right to define her own principles

in terms of his integrity and transparent righteousness. America that produced Abraham Lincoln can beget other sons in his likeness and train them up in his spirit. It will be a proud day for our country when other nations think of him, and believe that Americans are like him and that America is filled with his spirit. In that great day we can proudly say to the world, "This is America, the land of Lincoln.'

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